



Consumer Protection Announces 2013 Top Complaints

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Contact: Jerad Albracht, 608-224-5007

Jim Dick, Communications Director, 608-224-5020

MADISON – If Wisconsin’s seniors felt like leaving their phones off the hook in 2013, no one would blame them. The Telemarketing category sits at number one on the “Top Ten Consumer Complaints of 2013” list released today by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), and autodialing scams targeting seniors were the focus of many of those complaints.

“Wisconsin seniors faced a number of phone-based scams in 2013, and many of the calls they received offered well-crafted, attractive pitches – particularly for seniors with medical needs,” said Sandy Chalmers, Division Administrator for Trade and Consumer Protection.

“We received a high volume of complaints involving robocalls that fraudulently pitched medical alert devices and different types of ‘assistance’ programs for senior citizens. DATCP has worked with state and federal partners to take action against the groups behind a number of these scams,” said Chalmers.

Telemarketing tops the annual count for the eleventh straight year, with nearly twice as many complaints (2,014 complaints) as the second-ranked category, Landlord/Tenant (1,052).

Telecommunications switched places with the Landlord/Tenant category, dropping to third in this year’s rankings with 573 total complaints. Complaints in the Telecommunications category were similar to previous years – billing disputes, channel availability and service and contract issues were the most commonly noted problems by consumers.

“Telecommunications issues often boil down to questions about disclosures, so it is very important for consumers to read the fine print in their service contracts before they agree to the terms,” said Chalmers.

Identity Theft was fourth in the rankings for the second straight year, with 398 total complaints filed. Within this category, more than half of the total complaints involved tax-related theft. In most of these complaints, a consumer filed their taxes, only to be told by the IRS that a return had already been filed using their name and Social Security number.

“Tax identity fraud has been on the rise in recent years and is a major focus of concern for the IRS and other federal and state agencies,” said Chalmers. “To combat this problem, DATCP asks Wisconsin consumers to protect their personal information year-round and to report any questionable behaviors they see at tax preparation businesses to our agency.”

Home Improvement was ranked fifth with 325 complaints, followed closely by the Airline category (6th, 318 complaints). Complaints in this category were mainly related to two issues: the closure of De Pere-based carrier MetJet and a troubled frequent flier promotion involving Frontier Airlines and Delta Air Lines. In the case of the Frontier/Delta promotion, DATCP’s mediation efforts helped consumers transfer more than 18,700,000 miles collectively from Frontier’s program to Delta’s program.

Rounding out the top ten are the categories of Gas Pump Accuracy (7th); Motor Vehicle Sales (8th); Motor Vehicle Repair (9th); and Contest/Sweepstakes/Prize Promotions (10th).

DATCP recorded 10,454 new formal written complaints in 2013.

For more information or to file a consumer complaint, visit datcp.wi.gov, send an email to datcp hotline@wisconsin.gov or call the Consumer Information Hotline toll-free at 1-800-422-7128.

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Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

TOP TEN CONSUMER COMPLAINTS OF 2013

<u>RANK</u>		<u># OF</u>
<u>IN 2013</u>	<u>PRODUCT / PROBLEM</u>	<u>COMPLAINTS</u>

The top ten product categories are:

1	Telemarketing (No-Call)	2,014
2	Landlord / Tenant	1,052
3	Telecommunications	573
4	Identity Theft	398
5	Home Improvement	325
6	Airline	318
7	Gas Pump Accuracy	284
8	Motor Vehicle Sales	225
9	Motor Vehicle Repair	207
10	Contest / Sweepstakes / Prize Promotions	149